

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SSM-03

IO-13 SAM-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 AID-05 EB-07 /087 W

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R 011414Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 306

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 7479

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, EG, XF

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH HEAD OF EGYPTIAN RELATIONS
OFFICE IN DAMASCUS

1. NEWLY ARRIVED HEAD OF EGYPTIAN RELATIONS OFFICE IN DAMASCUS, AMIN YOUSRI, CALLED ON CHARGE NOVEMBER 1. HE SAID HIS ASSIGNMENT TO DAMASCUS HAD COME AS SURPRISE. FONMIN FAHMY HAD CABLED MINISTRY FROM RIYADH ORDERING HIM TO DAMASCUS IMMEDIATELY. HE ARRIVED TWENTY-FOUR HOURS LATER WITH HASTILY PACKED SUITCASES, LEAVING FAMILY IN CAIRO. HE WAS MET BY SYRIAN PROTOCOL OFFICIAL AND SPENT FIRST THREE DAYS IN HOTEL. HAS NOW MOVED TO EGYPTIAN RESIDENCE ("IN A FRIGHTFUL STATE") AND IS USING A SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY VEHICLE WHICH HAS BEEN PLACED AT HIS DISPOSAL.

2. YOUSRI'S PRIME PREOCCUPATION IS TO REOPEN EGYPTIAN OFFICE WHICH WAS COMPLETELY DESTROYED LAST JUNE.

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INITIALLY, HE SAID, SYRIAN OFFICIALS WERE NONCOMMITTAL

REGARDING PAYMENT OF COMPENSATION BUT ON DAY FOLLOWING ASAD'S RETURN FROM CAIRO, HE WAS TOLD POSITIVELY THAT SARG WOULD RESTORE OFFICE. SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS WITH MFA OFFICIALS HAVE PRODUCED EXPRESSIONS OF GOODWILL BUT NO PRACTICAL RESULTS, AND YOUSRI FEARS PROCESS WILL TAKE SOME TIME. HE IS CLAIMING ONE MILLION SYRIAN POUNDS (DOLS 256,410) IN DAMAGES.

3. COMPOUNDING HIS PROBLEMS, YOUSRI SAID, WAS LACK OF STAFF AND ADMINISTRATIVE/FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO REOPEN OFFICE. TWO CLERKS HAD BEEN SENT ALONG WITH HIM BUT NO OTHER DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL. IN ADDITION, OFFICE COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT HAD BEEN DESTROYED IN JUNE AND HE HAD NO WAY OF COMMUNICATING WITH CAIRO, ESPECIALLY SINCE THERE WAS NO DIRECT TELEPHONE LINK. HE HAD TRAVELED TO AMMAN ONCE TO SEND MESSAGES, BUT FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES HE WAS CUT OFF FROM HIS MINISTRY. HE SAID HE HAD NOT KNOWN OF ARAB LEAGUE REP AL-KHOLI'S ARRIVAL IN DAMASCUS OCTOBER 31 UNTIL HE WAS CALLED FROM AIRPORT AFTER PLANE HAD LANDED. HE HAD NO INFORMATION TO OFFER REGARDING POSSIBLE VISITS OF GENERAL GEMASSI OR OTHER EGYPTIAN FIGURES IN FUTURE.

4. ON SUBSTANTIVE MATTERS, YOUSRI WAS PESSIMISTIC. HE NOTED THAT VISIT OF SYRIAN GENERALS TLAS AND JAMIL TO BHAMDOUN OCT. 30 HAD BEEN PORTRAYED BY SYRIAN MEDIA AS A VISIT TO FRONT LINES WITH THE ENEMY. THIS IN HIS MIND RAISED DOUBTS AS TO SYRIA'S REAL INTENTIONS. HE ALSO MENTIONED SHORTFALL IN PLEDGES OF FINANCING FOR ARAB DETERRENT FORCE AND ATTITUDE OF CHAMOUN AS OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVING REAL CEASEFIRE IN LEBANON.

5. BIOGRAPHIC. YOUSRI IS ABOUT 5'4" AND IN EARLY FORTIES. HE ENTERED EGYPTIAN FOREIGN SERVICE ABOUT 1962 AND HAS SERVED IN IRAQ AND PARIS. FOR PAST YEAR AND HALF, HE HAS BEEN LECTURER ON ARAB AFFAIRS IN EGYPTIAN FONMIN EQUIVALENT OF FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE. HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF SOMETHING OF AN EXPERT ON ARAB AFFAIRS BUT DRAWS CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN EGYPTIANS AND EASTERN ARABS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: COMPENSATION, DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS, BUILDING DAMAGE, ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976DAMASC07479
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760406-1129
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761194/aaaaddy1.tel
Line Count: 108
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 APR 2004 by CollinP0>; RELEASED <27 APR 2004 by CollinP0>; APPROVED <08 OCT 2004 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATION WITH HEAD OF EGYPTIAN RELATIONS OFFICE IN DAMASCUS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, EG, XF, (YOUSRI, AMIN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006